

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A starter comprising:

a housing;

~~a motor generating a rotational force from its armature;~~

~~a rotary~~an output shaft rotatably disposed, said output shaft extending along

an axial direction of the output shaft~~driven by said motor;~~

a plurality of rolling-contact bearings aligned ~~in an~~along the axial direction of the output shaft,~~each rolling contact bearing having rolling members;~~

a pinion shaft inserted in an inner cylindrical bore of each rolling-contact bearing so as to be supported by ~~a said~~ housing via said rolling-contact bearings; ~~bearings, disposed rotatably on said output shaft via a plain bearing, and shiftable on said output shaft in the axial direction; and~~

a plain bearing disposed between said output shaft and said pinion shaft so as to rotatably dispose said pinion shaft on said output shaft, and supporting said pinion shaft in cooperation with said rolling-contact bearings such that said pinion shaft is shiftable along the axial direction;

a motor generating a rotational force to rotate said output shaft, said pinion shaft receiving the rotational force from said output shaft and being rotated; and

a pinion gear attached in a cantilever fashion to a distal end of said pinion shaft opposed to said motor, and ~~selectively~~ meshing with a ring gear of an engine in a startup operation to transmit the rotational force of ~~the motor~~said pinion shaft to said ring ~~gear-gear,~~

wherein a clearance between said plain bearing and said output shaft is set to be larger than a clearance between said rolling-contact bearings and said pinion shaft.

2. (Original) The starter in accordance with claim 1, wherein said rolling-contact bearings comprise a first rolling-contact bearing and a second rolling-contact bearing arranged next to each other in the axial direction with a predetermined clearance therebetween.

3. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 1, wherein each of said rolling-contact bearings is a ball bearing having balls serving as ~~said~~ rolling members.

4. (Canceled)

5. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 1, further comprising a one-way clutch coupled around said output shaft via a helical spline ~~coupling of~~ said one-way clutch, and being shiftable on said output shaft in the axial direction together with said pinion shaft, and transmitting a rotational force ~~to transmit rotation~~ of said output shaft to said pinion shaft,

wherein an axial end of said rolling-contact bearings ~~closer to~~ on a side of said motor is disposed ~~closely adjacent~~ to said one-way clutch when said pinion shaft is positioned far from said motor to engage the pinion gear to the ring gear.

6. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 1, further comprising a one-way clutch coupled around said output shaft via ~~a~~ an internal helical spline ~~coupling of said one-way clutch, and being~~ shiftable on said output shaft in the axial direction together with said pinion shaft, and transmitting a rotational force ~~to transmit rotation~~ of said output shaft to said pinion shaft,

wherein said internal helical spline of said one-way clutch meshes with an external helical spline of said output shaft to transmit the rotational force of said output shaft to said pinion shaft via said external helical spline and said internal helical spline, and a coupling clearance of said helical spline coupling between said external helical spline and said internal helical spline is larger than a clearance between said rolling-contact bearings and said pinion shaft.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 1, wherein a speed reduction device is disposed between said ~~armature motor~~ and said output shaft to reduce rotation ~~of generated in said armature motor~~ and transmit reduced rotation to said output shaft.

9. (Currently Amended) A starter comprising:  
a housing;  
~~a motor generating a rotational force from its armature;~~  
a rotary output shaft rotatably disposed, said output shaft extending along an axial direction of the output shaft driven by said motor;  
~~a ball bearing having a plurality rows of balls which are aligned in an axial direction and interposed between a pair of external and internal rings~~ a plurality of rolling-contact bearings aligned along the axial direction of the output shaft;  
a pinion shaft inserted in an inner cylindrical bore of said ball bearing each rolling contact bearing so as to be supported by a said housing via said ball bearing rolling

~~contact bearings; disposed rotatably on said output shaft via a plain bearing, and shiftable on said output shaft in the axial direction; and~~

a plain bearing disposed between said output shaft and said pinion shaft so as to rotatably dispose said pinion shaft on said output shaft, and supporting said pinion shaft in cooperation with said rolling-contact bearings such that said pinion shaft is shiftable along the axial direction;

a one-way clutch having an internal helical spline coupled with an external helical spline of said output shaft, said one-way clutch being shiftable on said output shaft along the axial direction together with said pinion shaft;

a motor generating a rotational force to rotate said output shaft in response to the rotational force, said pinion shaft receiving the rotational force from said output shaft via said external helical spline and said internal helical spline and being rotated; and

a pinion gear attached in a cantilever fashion to a distal end of said pinion shaft opposed to said motor, and ~~selectively~~-meshing with a ring gear of an engine in a startup operation to transmit the rotational force of ~~the motor~~ said pinion shaft to said ring ~~gear-gear~~,

wherein a coupling clearance between said external helical spline and said internal helical spline is set to be larger than a clearance between said rolling-contact bearings and said pinion shaft.

10. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 9, ~~further comprising a one-way clutch coupled around said output shaft via a helical spline coupling and shiftable on said output shaft in the axial direction together with said pinion shaft to transmit rotation of said output shaft to said pinion shaft,~~

wherein an axial end of said ball bearing ~~closer to~~ on a side of said motor is disposed ~~closely~~ adjacent to said one-way clutch when said pinion shaft is positioned far from said motor to engage the pinion gear to the ring gear.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 9, wherein a clearance between said plain bearing and said output shaft is larger than ~~a~~ the clearance between said ~~ball bearing~~ rolling-contact bearings and said pinion shaft.

13. (Currently Amended) The starter in accordance with claim 9, wherein a speed reduction device is disposed between said ~~armature-motor~~ and said output shaft to reduce rotation ~~of~~ generated in said ~~armature-motor~~ and transmit reduced rotation to said output shaft.

14. (New) The starter in accordance with claim 9, wherein each of said rolling-contact bearings is a ball bearing having balls serving as rolling members.